# Serving the Disadvantaged from the Administrative Viewpoint

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CHARLES SILBERMAN in describing the basic premise of his book *Crisis in the Classroom* states:

> In an era of radical change such as the present, no approach is more impractical than one which takes the present arrangements and practices as given, asking only, "How can we do what we are now doing more effectively?" or "How can we bring the worst institutions up to the level of the best?" These questions need to be asked, to be sure; but one must also realize that the best may not be good enough and may, in any case, already be changing. And so we choose to work on two levels simultaneously: a level of short-run reform, where one works within the existing system, and a longer-run concern with the transformation of the system.[1]

Like Silberman we try to bring some order into the chaos of everyday library living with a two dimensional approach. To assume that functioning on two levels accommodates the pragmatic and the visionary is overly simplistic, for the two levels are interfaced and interacting. Serving the disadvantaged in the urban setting requires the melding of more imaginative professional planning with more efficient management of daily operations.

Library administrators must work on two interacting levels to find out why and what we are doing, and to think seriously about the purpose and the consequences of our services. As sources of public funding diminish we are more accountable than ever before to meet public needs. Too frequently librarians are preoccupied with a holding action until budgetary and staff problems are resolved. The myth of returning to business as usual must be dispelled.

Silberman states that major deficiencies in public education—and he includes libraries in the full range of education—result not from venality, indifference or stupidity, but from *mindlessness*.[2] Mindlessness and

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the reluctance to question established practices are largely responsible for our failure to make a people truly educated. If people were truly educated would we have a wave of anti-intellectualism in America; would there be the curse of bigness and failure to manage or control the "organization"; would we have a manipulative technology seemingly bereft of human values, which victimizes rather than serves; would we accept the banality of mass media which (except for a few high spots) preserves the clichés of a society caught in the bewildering turmoil of issues?

Library materials and methods of delivery of services can provide the means whereby volatile and highly charged ideas bring about change and influence social and political action. Some books have effectively challenged our cherished notions and have influenced change—*The Throwaway Children*[3] by Lisa Richette refutes the idea that we have loved our children; *Death at an Early Age*[4] by Jonathan Kozol disproves the idea that our schools are sanctuaries for the good and noble; *The Secular City*[5] by Harvey Cox questions the idea that our churches are the bulwark of man's humanity to man; *The American University*[6] by Jacques Barzun places in more realistic perspective the idea that our universities are citadels for the pursuit of excellence; *Soul on Ice*[7] by Eldridge Cleaver demonstrates that our approach to minorities has been scarred by racist practices and attitudes; *The Great Conspiracy Trial*[8] by Jason Epstein challenges the idea that our courts are beacons of justice; and *Our Time is Now*[9] by John Birmingham demonstrates that we have driven our youth underground by suppressing their forms of expression.

The issues outlined in the above-mentioned books present but a few of the reasons why libraries and librarians must find ways to reach out to the core of the cities or the centers of deprivation where they can touch upon the edge of growing awareness and unrecognized aspiration. Robert Theobald, as one of the "Current Scene" lecturers of The Free Library of Philadelphia, indicated that there is a clear, consistent human argument which shows that people are best able to solve their own problems if they are provided with the information required to make effective decisions.[10] Not only is it necessary that ideas and information penetrate the barriers of despair, apathy, and rage in the inner-city, but also opportunities for cultural expression must be provided. The public library is unique in its capabilities for nurturing the self-education process and the great potential it has for providing "little Lincoln Centers" at neighborhood levels—perhaps with soul music in-

stead of symphonies, graphics instead of gouache, or Afro dances instead of classical ballet—or whatever the community life style dictates.

Demonstration projects have made an impression, but service to the disadvantaged cannot be fostered by fragmentary activities. It can be fostered within existing institutions provided total commitment and strong administrative direction are given the following: (1) organization and planning, (2) financing, (3) interagency cooperation and community relations, and (4) staffing.

### ORGANIZATION AND PLANNING

John Gardner has said self-examination and self-renewal must be continuous,[11] yet few librarians can clearly define their purpose or goals other than to fall back on the "education, recreation, inspiration" syndrome. We cannot continue to assume that our libraries can be all things to all people. Perhaps one day when we have a national network of library service such might be the case, but until then we must work (on our two levels) to correct apparent weaknesses in structure while transforming the structure itself.

Like other large city libraries forced into new relationships within various governmental structures, The Free Library of Philadelphia undertook the task of redefining policy and program for the Program-Planning-Budgeting System (PPBS) inaugurated by the city of Philadelphia in May of 1969. Ultimately a report was to be submitted in conjunction with the city planning commission. The process of redefining has continued, for the library staff found that it could not toss the report together like a salad without any dressing (we had the ingredients but not the essence). It is essential in such analyses to isolate the problems, establish the goals, collect data, and concur on the specific library's reorganization plan. Only then can library administrators arrive at the very heart of the matter—the application of new principles to existing forms and patterns of service—and really come to grips with *change*.

A brief outline of Philadelphia's comprehensive plan for library service over the next ten years follows:

1. It reemphasizes a commitment to stimulate library use by all the people in the service area, but places special stress on the educationally and economically deprived. The plan accounts for advances made thus far with infusion of federal and state aid. It recognizes trends such as shifts in population; new technological developments; accessibility, currency, and expendability of information; multi-

media orientation of today's youth; and the inability of public institutions to finance collection development and delivery of services.

2. It asserts the position of the central library as the reference-resource facility for the entire library system and the entire Delaware Valley with research collections and supportive functions. It also recognizes state-wide responsibilities and services.
3. It reaffirms the regional concept which lagged after our first and very successful Northeast Regional Library was built in 1963. Since the plan emphasizes The Free Library of Philadelphia's commitment to decentralization, the pressing need for regional libraries is increasingly apparent.
4. It provides for local library service in a network of various extension agencies: branches, satellites, mobile units and deposit collections. The unique aspect of the plan establishes a "cluster" pattern consisting of a headquarters library and smaller neighborhood library outlets for the inner-city to overcome problems of inaccessibility and to promote outreach.
5. Collection and staff development are to be synthesized into the various levels of service, with built-in provisions for field work and community self-determination.

Most large urban libraries are engaged in not one but several comprehensive plans for immediate or long-range implementation. To seize opportunities as they arise requires applying the administrative stethoscope to numerous pulses at the same time. It is no easy task to synchronize all project planning. However, interaction and spin-off benefits can prove to be both stimulating and helpful if objectives and priorities are firmly established. The viability of total planning is often borne out by the offshoots which may be separately proposed and funded. For example, The Free Library of Philadelphia has developed a multi-faceted model cities plan which is compatible with the principles of the library's comprehensive plan. Although the model cities proposal has never been funded, various components of the plan have been effectuated through LSCA Title I and private routes. Thus the "Free Wheeler" and the library unit of the Model Cities Community Information Center (MCCIC) came into being.[12]

The Free Wheeler is equipped with a loudspeaker which is used not only to advertise its own services, but to play Pied Piper to groups of people who can be encouraged to attend and made welcome at programs planned in the existing branches. Its advertising facilities are also used to interpret and encourage use of model cities activities and

resources in the area. During the winter the Free Wheeler serves as a distribution vehicle for deposit collections that are placed in the service agencies where so many of the model cities residents have long periods of sitting and waiting.

MCCIC, directed by the Health and Welfare Council, includes a computerized data bank with referral information for the services so badly needed by the model cities' residents. It also has an advanced telephone system with three-way conversations so that a model cities resident can be plugged into the service agency with the MCCIC operator acting as advocator and mediator. The third element of this service is a community education program whereby all agencies of the area are alerted to its potential services. Two professional librarians and a secretary are assigned to the information center for referral and information input. Although the service has not as yet reached its potential, it has proved a valuable learning experience for the librarians involved. Future library development of information services using printouts from such data banks poses interesting possibilities, particularly in the reorganization of central reference and resource facilities. It is also possible to envision terminal outlets in branches for improved access to needed information.

### FINANCING

The planning process provides the framework for budgetary requests and fiscal projections. It is particularly important to have a well developed plan and a series of alternatives in times of financial stress. The serious financial plight of the cities has created problems libraries must face along with all other city services. Libraries in New York, Detroit, Philadelphia, and elsewhere have been forced to reduce hours and curtail public services such as story hours, film showings, and experimental programs. Any further nibbling away of services will cut into the heart of the organization itself. When personnel costs soar and the job freeze is imposed, branches must be closed; a mortal blow is thus struck at the underutilized inner-city library outlets. When the sources of funding are limited, library materials' budgets decline in proportion to wage increases. Consequently mass distribution of adult basic education materials or giveaway paperback projects in prisons and juvenile detention centers become impossible.

Decentralization and outreach require skilled staff and heavy duplication of specialized materials for the nonprint-oriented inner-city resident. Are the carefully developed plans for library service to the disad-

vantaged to fail for lack of funds? Clearly, limited staff and resources must be redeployed, and new sources of revenue must be found.

In Philadelphia we have explored new financial arrangements on a cooperative basis with educational institutions of the city considering redevelopment funds, model cities, labor department, and other federal sources. Unfortunately, small independent special projects are often more easily funded than efforts to mobilize total institutional resources for massive impact. Moreover, special projects, often fragmentary, which are defined as demonstrations cannot prove their value in two or three years and are increasingly unlikely to be continued by local financing.

There is great need for interstate compacts and regional development plans for revenue sharing. For example, the central library in Philadelphia services great numbers of New Jersey residents, particularly over weekends. The possibility of financing these services cooperatively is worthy of serious consideration. It is interesting to note that dialogues regarding central library reorganization have taken place recently between The Free Library of Philadelphia, the Enoch Pratt Library and the Mid-Manhattan Library. The Mid-Manhattan Library[13] is the New York Public Library's solution to the problems of having no tax-supported central library. Enoch Pratt is reorganizing its central services for state-wide use and financing. Philadelphia's study of its central library aims to modernize its functions and interrelate its services more effectively within the city, state and a tri-state region. As there is little assurance of additional support from depleted city and state treasuries, The Free Library of Philadelphia cannot anticipate or project the pattern of city, county and state sharing of funds outlined by Lowell Martin for the Chicago Public Library.[14] Federal, private and interstate financing must be explored.

Another aspect of the financial picture which wreaks havoc with new approaches to inner-city services is the capital budget. Often the source of large grants for library expansion, capital programs have now locked city libraries into a rigid structure of obsolete and poorly located buildings. Even under conditions of great financial stress, political support for capital budgets is usually guaranteed, while there is less than enthusiastic endorsement of necessary operating budget requests. This places library administrators in the untenable position of having to close existing branches in order to open new ones.

Obviously the financial crunch is crucial to the management of the total library organism. If planning and determination of goals have

been well defined, price tags can be put on funded and unfunded services. Fund raising campaigns of various sorts can then be considered. The library board of trustees and citizen coalition groups have their role to play in aggressively seeking new sources of support recommended by library administrators.

### STAFFING

Fiscal problems have serious consequences regarding staff and service to the disadvantaged. To preserve some semblance of order despite chaotic financial limitations requires a highly adaptive staff who often find themselves forced into the dismal blind alley of clerical routines. The high cost of personnel results in job freezes; indeed more drastic situations force layoff procedures which, even if rescinded (as was Philadelphia's experience), leave deep scars and a prevailing lack of faith in the system or the administration. Administrators and subordinate staff alike float helplessly on a sea of uncertainty. The larger the library system, the greater is the difficulty in breaking free of bureaucratic snares under conditions which call for greater flexibility, experimentation, and innovation. There are just fewer people with sufficient skill to handle more complex work.

Many of the new library recruits are fired with zeal and the desire to serve the inner-city. Unfortunately they are often at a loss if given a free rein, for their lack of experience does not equip them with the necessary professional competence and aplomb to improvise within a given difficult situation. Guidelines and consultation are necessary in order to encourage new approaches to the non-users of conventional as well as innovative library outlets. Field work and in-house projects must be attempted, and failures must be acknowledged as part of the trial and error process. If administrative support is given in good faith, the staff on the firing line will inch forward bit by bit in their relationships with unmotivated inner-city residents. For example, in one of Philadelphia's branches, two librarians were able to turn their meeting room into a game center to hold the interest of teen-age boys who constantly disrupted normal branch activity.

In another instance, a librarian was reassigned from the rare book department to a small experimental library operation in a flourishing community center. The job freeze forced the rare book department to carry the vacancy for the entire year, but the program ideas and book selection principles emerging from the project gave new insights to the librarian, the coordinator who acted as consultant to the project, the

chief of the extension division, and the associate director in charge of public services. It was learned that the former practice of providing deposit collections in centers of this type lacked the on-the-spot vitality which only a librarian can give to these services. Moreover, the project proved workable as one kind of nerve ending for the cluster concept of the library's comprehensive plan.

During the past year, The Free Library of Philadelphia balanced future planning with daily crises in facing a city deficit of which its share was over $900,000. The priorities established under a full year of total job freeze clearly indicated that reader services and reference services be given top priority. The policy was to encourage outreach activities as much as possible. All programming activities were curtailed within departments and branches. Staff meetings were discontinued and inservice training courses cancelled.

A review of last year's priorities born out of crisis reveals that gains in outreach were not achieved from programming cutbacks. With yet another wage increase to be absorbed within an even more greatly reduced budget, the administrative decision is nevertheless to resume programming for somehow it stimulates outreach activities. Branch and department heads may proceed at their own discretion with full knowledge that staff transfers to cover emergencies are apt to occur without advance notice. Inservice training and staff meetings also will be resumed as there was a decided breakdown in communication when they were discontinued.

It is important to note that a staff manual on serving the disadvantaged is no answer to the problem of staff training. A set of written principles may provide a starting point, but constant evaluation and assessment of how an individual librarian draws upon his personal resources and professional techniques in order to resolve a given problematical situation is necessary. Senior staff—in Philadelphia's case, the coordinators of age level services—play a key role here.

Not only the new recruits and young librarians need to be considered as stress exerts its debilitating influence. Minor supervisors and mid-career staff often feel caught in the squeeze between new ideas of self-determination and personnel demands and old concepts of orderliness and service. Unionization of librarians causes uncomfortable adjustments for many who have worked evenings, holidays and weekends without thoughts of overtime pay and other benefits. Some prefer job security to wage increases.

Senior staff, too, deserve consideration for they are central to the

problem of interpreting and implementing new directions in library service within the limitations imposed by conditions of austerity. They often feel threatened by the loss of authority and control implicit in decentralization. Overworked and understaffed, they are buffers for the tensions building upward and downward. Their morale also must be boosted for they are influential in setting the tone and preventing panic down the line. All senior staff at The Free Library of Philadelphia are contributing their expertise to the comprehensive plan and its translation into the capital program. They are involved in determining action regarding each city directive on the constantly changing financial status of the library.

The Free Library's comprehensive plan places more autonomy at the local service level. It stresses use of indigenous personnel and establishes a career ladder for paraprofessionals. It also places the subject specialist at a higher rank on the organization chart. To implement these personnel changes within a rigid civil service system and inflexible placement procedures is staggering to contemplate, but it is not impossible.

### INTERAGENCY COOPERATION AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS

At a time when everyday problems accelerate and operational breakdowns occur for lack of staff and funds, maintaining ongoing ties with other community institutions and organizations is difficult but must be done. The Philadelphia Student Library Resource Requirements Study[15] is regarded by the project director as an outstanding example of school (public, private and parochial) and public library cooperation. As it enters the demonstration phase, new techniques should evolve for reaching disadvantaged children and teen-agers with meaningful school-related and personal library services.

Community self-determination is a strong force which puts library professionalism to the test and often presents new problems for which we have no precedents to follow. The old adult education techniques based on somewhat paternalistic principles no longer work. Despite setbacks, hostility and even rejection by local residents demanding library services on their terms, librarians must act in good faith and keep a foot in the door in order to be truly responsive to the needs of the people. The Free Library's top administrative staff devoted considerable time to such a learning experience this past year when a local inner-city group refused to accept plans for a branch library rehabilitated from an old theater. The result was demolition of the old building and plans

for a new regional library on the site, now in the capital budget. A good working relationship based on mutual trust has evolved and this group, along with others representative of affluent, middle class, and other inner-city areas, have joined together to form a citizens' coalition for increased library support in Philadelphia.

The priorities set by adversity can tell us a great deal about the investment of staff time in terms of service impact. Clues to new directions will surface if librarians are sensitive, alert, and really committed to seek new directions despite problems posed by financial and governmental failings. As we struggle to balance technocracy with humanism, we must combat, above all, the *mindlessness* that Charles Silberman has singled out as the greatest enemy of social and educational progress.

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